The Social Pirates The Music Swindlers Howard Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

LOOK of sadness tinged the handsome face of Casper Carson, the young millionaire social worker and philanthropist, as he paused under the flickering rays of the corner street light. "Are you satisfied with your glimpse of the slums at night?"

he asked Mona Hartley, who, with Mary Burnett, had been making a tour of the sordid streets after

dark in his watchful care.
"Of course, I am not satisfied!" she cried im-"Isn't it possible to do anything to

change all this?" "How would you change it?" returned Carson rather bitterly. "I have given three years and half of my fortune to a study of civic conditions, and I am beginning to think that I am going backward instead of forward! You have got to change conditions like this from the inside out—not from the outside in. You have got to deal with the individual rather than with the mass. You have got—" He broke off his comments with a little cry, and swinging about, raised his voice in a hail to a tall, well set-up young man, who had just rounded the opposite

corner The other stared in the direction of the call. his attitude showing amazement as he recognized Carson. Then with a swinging stride he crossed

What in the name of Heaven brings you here?" he demanded.

"I want you to meet two young friends of mine." said Carson, smiling at the other's dubious expression. "Miss Burnett and Miss Hartley, allow me to present my good friend, Rodney Grant of The Star. Mr Grant is one of the most fearless and capable newspaper reporters I have ever known—and I have had experience with a good many!"
"Forget it!" laughed Grant, shaking hands

with the two girls, but still unable to cover his surprise, and studying them shrewdly. The young women had dressed for the occasion in rough suits and hats, which might have fooled a casual sser-by, but which only acceptuated their refinement to a close observer

"Miss Hartley and Miss Burnett are much interested in practical sociology," explained Car-son, "and have been studying the slums at night under my guidance and protection. If you could persuade them to talk, old man, you would have some thrilling stories for The Star of their ex-

periences. Won't you to'm us?"

"Delighted," said Grant, "if you don't mind waiting until I call the office."

The girls waited while the two men went to talephone.

For a few moments the two girls surveyed the night scene before them, their attention directed mainly toward the goody restaurant across the street. It was Mona who saw first the hesitating young woman, with the white, pinched face, who had paused before the restaurant, and stood peering fearfully in through the

The young woman before the restaurant drew out a coin from a frayed purse in her hand, made a movement as though to pass through the door-way of the cafe, and then drew back with a shud-With the coin still chutched in her hand, she passed quickly down the street, entered a drug store and exchanged the coin for a phial of something, Mona and Mary following and watching her. The girl entered a small park and was rais-ing the phial to her lips when Mona caught and held her hand. The unmistakeable odor of carbolic scid floated up into Mona's face.

The young woman on the bench struggled desperately, but the next instant Mona had wrenched the phial away and dashed it onto the

'Now," she said soothingly, "if you will tell what it is all about, maybe I can help you!"
"Help me!" echoed the young woman with a bitter little laugh. "You are a nice one to talk about helping me when you took the only way out of it all away from me! Oh, why did you do it? Why didn't you let me take the chance when I had it? Now—" she held out her empty purse, and broke into an hysterical laugh.

Mons dropped onto the bench at her side. "It is always blackest just before dawn! I know that it is easy enough to tell you that and that you probably won't believe it. But if you can persuade yourself to tell me your story, I will promise that if I cannot offer a definite way of help to you, I will buy another bottle of acid for you without a word!"

You really mean it?" For a moment the young woman sat studying the faces of the two girls, half revealed in the uncertain rays of the park lights. "I'll chance it!" she decided abruptly. 'I can't be worse off than I am now. That is one consolation!"

She plunged into her story nervously name is Winnie Andrews. Oh, I am a good girl! Maybe, it would be better for me if I wasn't. I have been foolish, never bad. I was foolish enough to think that I had a voice, that I could sing-and I was more foolish when I believed a man who told me I was right, that I would some day be a second Melba! My home was in Ohio. There is no need to tell you the name of the town. One day I saw in a news-paper the advertisement of a concern, calling it-'The Twentieth Century Vocal Academy of New York City.' It seemed to offer just the courses of instruction which I thought I needed, persuaded my father to draw his savings from the bank to pay my expenses. With the money I came to New York, and met the head of the music school, a man who gave me the name of Professor Alonzo Herrman. voice, or at least pretended to do so, and said that there was no doubt of my success as an opera singer if I took his course of instruction.

'I stayed at the school for several months, and then my father came on to see me. Professor Herrman talked so enthusiastically about my future, that we decided it would be safe to mort-• gage our home for enough money to finish my schooling. The Professor introduced us to a man calling himself a money-lender, who advanced us a small sum on our property, taking a mortgage as security. Several months more passed. I was becoming vaguely uneasy as Professor Herrman's instruction showed no results, but it was not until I received word that my father was ill that I became really alarmed. I went to Professor Herrman and asked him if he could not secure me some kind of a position where I could earn money with my voice, enough money to take care of my father, but he only laughed in my face, and called me an easy mark. I guess he saw that he had gotten about all the money possible out of us, and that the time had come to disillusion me The next week they foreclosed the mortgage on our home, and the shock killed my father! then I have been trying desperately to get work, any kind of work. Of course, I have lost all my wonderful dreams about my voice. I have been

willing to do anything—but the harder I tried to find a place the worse things seemed to get until tonight I knew I had come to the end of the rope. I had a solitary quarter left. I stopped at a restaurant, wondering whether to spend the quarter for food—or poison! I decided on the and then you came!"

Winnie Andrews stared vacantly into the shadows as she finished her pathetic story, and for a few moments Mona and Mary revolved her narrative silently. It was Mona who spoke at

"I am glad we have found you—you poor dear! Not only for your own sake, but for the sake of hundreds of other girls, who probably have been victimized in the same way. heard a good deal about the so-called 'fake music but this is my first definite knowledge of them. It is high time that the Twentieth Century Vocal Academy and Professor Alonzo Herrman were put out of business!"

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dearest friend, Hattie Gordon. Hattie thinks she can sing, and they seem to think so, too, for they have told her that they will finance a theatrical company, and star her! When she telephoned me this morning, and told me of what they were doing, I could hardly hold myself! Of course, they
are using my father's money, the money which
ought to be mine, to do it with! The scoundrels!"

Mary saw the Professor's eyes glisten, and

even before he spoke, she knew that he had fallen into her trap. He drew closer to her, and lowered his voice confidentially.
"Do you want to get back your money—and

at the same time give your father's swindlers a sample of their own methods?" Mary nodded, excitedly. "Oh, if I only could-

but that is impossible!" "Not at all—if you go about it the right way!

I think that I can be of real assistance to you,

if you want to join forces with me."

"Of course I do! I think you are the most



MONA, MARY AND CARSON VISIT THE SLUMS.

Winnie Andrews gazed at her wonderingly just as Herrman and Grant appeared. They dis-cussed the girl's plight and decided to work out some plan of saving the girl and breaking Herr-man. Mona and Mary took the girl to their home. The next morning Mary appeared at Herr man's studio.

-I have called to see whether it would be possible for me to be enrolled as one of your students?" she hesitated bashfully. "My name is

The Professor smiled, and rubbed his hands. "We are always looking for promising stu-dents." He looked at her again appraisingly. "Have you had vocal lessons before?"

Mary shook her head. "No-but I have been told so often that I have a remarkable voice, and that it ought to be developed that I would like to have the opinion of an expert like yourself."

"Just so! Just so! You are acting wisely It will be a pleasure to test your tone qualities and inflections, Miss Roberts. If you will follow me, I will take you to our private conservatory and will do myself the pleasure of examining your possibilities myself, rather than entrusting you to an assistant."

Professor Herrman closed the door, twirled the piano stool with a flourish, and seating himself at the instrument, asked Mary if she any favorite piece of music that she would like to sing. The girl named a popular melody at random, and the Professor rattled off the refrain playing with the exaggerated flourish of a vaude ville "artist." Mary sang through the opening verse, and the chorus. She was quite well aware that Nature had not given her a "voice," and that the most expert teaching in the world could never have developed any vocal ability in her. she sang with all the eagerness and trepidation, which she imagined a young woman, hoping for a musical career, would display. When she finished, the Professor swung around on his stool and again rubbed his hands.

"Marvelous! Marvelous!" he cried. "Permit me to congratulate you, my dear young lady! Assuredly you have a tremendous future before I can see great credit to us from your enrollment as a student! Yes, I can see that you have done wisely, very wisely in coming to us! After the necessary arrangements regarding

money, etc., Mary left. Several days after she had been given her first lesson, Mary felt it safe enough to venture on a more intimate footing with Herrman. As they were concluding their "lesson," she said in a sudden burst of confidence, "If I only had the money I had a year ago, I could organize my own

opera company, and win fame easily!" As the Professor expressed his sympathy, she explained that her father had been swindled of a large fortune by two unscrupulous speculators who had visited her home town, and that she had suddenly found herself thrown on the world, with the necessity of making her own living instead of looking forward to a life of ease and luxury. She dropped the subject abruptly, as though unable to endure the bitter memories which it called up. Two days later, however, she returned to it excitedly.

"What do you think has happened today, Professor?" she asked.

"I am sure I have no idea," was the sym-pathetic answer. "Tell me!"
"You remember the story I was telling you

of the two swindlers who had stolen my father's

"Certainly! They ought to be put behind the bars! "Well, they are in town now, and they have brought with them a girl, who used to be my

wonderful man I have ever known!" Mary looked up at him admiringly, and the Professor drew "Let me tell you what to do then. Get your

girl friend on the telephone, and tell her that you have found a manager, who is much interested her plans, and that you will introduce her to him. Tell her she can bring her friends with her,

"But I don't know any manager," protested

Mary.
"Of course you don't, but I do—and he is just
"The oirl studied his the man for our purpose." The girl studied his words for a moment in a pretended puzzled silence and then looked up with a smile of understanding.
"I think I see now what you mean!" She

a long breath. "I'll do it. I'll get Hattie on the 'phone now."

A meeting was arranged for the morrow. At two o'clock, Mona, in company with Casper Carson and Rodney Grant, who were to act the roles of the two clever swindlers, stopped before the apartment building, where the Vocal Acad-emy had established itself, and a few minutes later the trio were ushered into the private office of the principal. Herrman was awaiting them with his blandest, most professional smile, and with him was a stranger, whom he duly presented "Mr. James Peters, of whom you have heard, of course?

"And now," began the Professor, plunging into the depths of the business without delay, "I understand that Miss Gordon possesses much ability as a singer and actress, and that she is desirous of obtaining an opportunity to be brought before the public in the right way, and under the right management."

Carson nodded. "You have hit it exactly,

Professor. We believe in the young woman, and we stand ready to back her—if you can show us where we're going to get off. Of course, we business men, and the proposition must look

"Any suggestions which my friend, Mr. Peters may make, will be worth listening to." added the Professor gravely. The theatrical "manager" removed his black cigar, and surveyed Mona de liberately, as though studying her face and figure

"I can offer you the most attractive proposition which it has ever been in my power to present to anyone," he began. "But I will tell you at once that it means quick action. I am not the kind of man to do business on promises. From what the Professor tells me of Miss Roberts, she should make a real star. But she must have the right kind of play, and the proper backing. I have just the sort of vehicle that will fit her, but it means ten thousand-in cold cash! you gentlemen are ready to talk business, all right. If not, we had better have an understanding at once before any of us waste time." Carson waved his hand carelessly.

"We are in a position to put up ten thousand in ten minutes' notice, Mr. Peters. But you have got to convince me that we are going to have something for our money. I am ready to be convinced—and prepared to act just as soon as you convince me."

"Then you are the man I am looking for," Mr. "We will put up the ten thousand, Mr. Peters,

just as soon as you produce the contract and guarantee. Is that satisfactory?" said Carson. The Professor hastily turned to his desk to hide his smile of elation, as Peters nodded, and held out his hand. "That goes! I will notify you within twenty-four hours and then we can meet to close arrangements." He rose to his feet. "Glad

to have met you all! I can only say that you have done a good piece of business, not only for the young lady but for yourselves!"

He bowed himself out, and a moment later, Carson, Grant and Mona also took their departure, the Professor accompanying them to the elevator. and waving his hand genially to them as they descended. From the inner room Mary had heard the entire interview, and smiled delightedly to herself as she saw the progress which was being made. She was on the point of opening the door, and stepping into Herrman's office when the hall was pushed open, and Mona stepped in breathlessly. Herrman at his desk turned in surprise, as Mona made her way to his side, and slipped a note into his hand. Her face was flushed, and she was breathing quickly.

"I want to get better acquainted with you!" she confided, looking up into his face with a glance that melted any suspicions which Herrman might have entertained. "Can't you call? I have written down my address for you. I am so lonesome by myself in this big city that I would love to have you come and see me.

"Of course I'll come-with pleasure!" promised Herrman, beaming.

"But don't let Miss Roberts know I have asked you," said Mona hurriedly, calling Mary by the name under which the other had registered. "She is a little cat when she sees that men prefer me to her. And you do, don't you?

The Professor's smile deepened. "Of course I do! How could I think otherwise?"

Mona flashed him an answering smile, and the door was just closing behind her when Mary entered the office from the adjoining room. Without a word, she stepped across to Herrman, and held out her hand.

out her hand.
"Give me that note?" she demanded.
"What note?" evaded Herrman uneasily, try-

ing to hide it behind his back. "The note that brazen hussy gave you! She can't put anything like that over on me!" Herrman held out the note grudgingly, and Mary snatched it away, her eyes flashing.
"I thought that you were my friend!" she

said uttingly.
"I am!" protested Herrman.

Then you will have to prove it!" she re-

"Of course, I shall, my dear!" Herrman looked properly crestfallen, and humble. Mary looked at him, opened her lips as though to speak again, and then, without another word, stepped into the hall, slamming the door behind her.

Mary had hardly rejoined Mona in their flat when the telephone shrilled abruptly. Mona stepped to the instrument, laughing. 'Who wants to wager that it isn't Herrman?" She took down the receiver, and motioned Mary

and Winnie Andrews to come closer.
"How are you, Professor?" she called sweetly. "It is so good of you to remember me so soon! What is that? Will I be at home this evening?

Of course! Yes, indeed, I shall be glad to see She hung back the receiver and burst into a

paroxysm of merriment. "He will be here at eight. You will have to leave the coast clear, Mary. Let me see-you gave him your address, didn't you?" "I told him I lived in the suburbs. But I

think I will call on you tonight if you don't mind, dear? "Fine! Give me half an hour with him, and

I will guarantee to arrange as pretty a tableau as you ever saw." The girls hurried through their dinner, and

Mary and Winnie Andrews made their way to the street to watch for the coming of Herrman, while Mona proceeded to make an elaborate toilet for the event. The Professor was on time, and flushed with pleausre and conceit at the warmth of Mona's greeting. The girl told him demurely that her "aunt" was calling on friends, and that they were alone. She was an adept in the arts of the coquette, and aided by soft candle lights and the sentimental music which the Professor was drumming out of the piano, it was not long before Herrman showed that his conquest was complete.

He was bending over her on a when the hall door opened softly, and Mary burst into the room, with an exaggerated cry of welcome to Mona. Then she paused, as she recognized Herrman. The Professor stepped forward hastily, holding out his hand to her tenderly, but she "I did not know that you had company, Miss

Gordon!" she said icily. "I bid you good night!"
With her head held high and her eyes flashing, she strode from the room, leaving the dis-comfited Professor staring after her stupidly. In the corridor outside, she seized Winnie Andrews' arm and hurried to the street. "I want a taxi-cab quick! The Professor will

naturally think that I have gone to his office to wait for him, and have an accounting of his actions—and he will follow me there as soon as he can get away! You tell Mona where I have gone, and tell her I will 'phone her ! She sprang into a machine, waiting at the

corner and waved her hand jauntily. If her calculations were correct, she saw a daring way by which she could force issues that very night.

Mary made her way to the rooms of the Vocal Academy, which she knew were kept open until ten o'clock, and let herself into Herrman's private ffice. She did not have long to wait. In less than half an hour she heard a step outside, and the door opened to admit the Professor.

had hoped you would be here, my dear young friend! I have come to explain to you certain things, which I fear may have deceived

"There is no need of explanations!" said Mary curtly, rising. "I wasn't born yesterday, although I may appear innocent to you! I have decided that this affair has gone quite far enough. I was only waiting for you to come so that I could tell you to your face! I am going



SHE STRODE HAUGHTILY FROM THE ROOM.

to explain the whole game to Miss Gordon, and let her see for herself just what kind of a scoundrel you really are!"

She strode up to the desk and seized the tele-

phone. Herrman caught her arm pleadingly.
"You are hasty!" he protested. "Think what you are doing! Think of the share you are going to have for yourself from that ten thousand, which is just as good as in our hands now!

"I don't want the money! I am not going to

you put it over me, and take up with that little hussy!" stormed Mary. "We are wasting time talking! Besides, what assurance have I got that you wouldn't trick me out of the money -just as you have been playing with me before? "I give you my word!" said Herrman eagerly.

Mary shook her head. "There is only one thing I will do! I am going to get out of the whole matter tonight! If you want to pay me five thousand dollars for my share, I will let the girl go, and keep still! Otherwise I shall have the satisfaction of telling her the facts!" Herrman drew back, shaking his head, and

Mary calmly gave the number of their flat to the exchange operator. It was enough. Herrman drew out a check-book, and sullenly wrote out an order for five thousand dollars. Mary hung back the receiver, and Herrman breathed easily once more.

"I will wait here," she said, "while you have this cashed. I prefer the money!" Herrman sul-lenly departed.

Back in the girls' flat, Mona, at about this same time, was relating gleefully to a little audience, consisting of Carson, Grant and Winnie Andrews, the details of Herrman's visit and Mary's spectacular intrusion. Carson listened to her story with an unusual gravity.

"You don't seem as enthusiastic as I expected you to be!" the girl cried suddenly, looking up at

Carson shook his head. "I find that man, Herrman, is a dangerous character-the kind that would stop at nothing to save himself if he fancied himself in a tight corner. Besides—" He broke off suddenly, and stealing to the hall door of the flat suddenly threw it open. A crouching man outside almost precipitated into the room. and the next moment Carson had fastened his hands in the other's collar and yanked him to his feet. Mona repressed a cry as she saw that the intruder was none other than the so-called theatrical "manager," whom Herrman had pre-sented to them earlier in the day. There was another cry of recognition-this time from Winnie Andrews.

"You villain!" burst out the girl, impulsively, springing toward him. "He is the scoundrel who posed as a money-lender, and killed my poor father!" she cried. Carson compressed his lips grimly, and dragged the man across the room to an inner bedroom, into which he thrust him, and locked the door. Without a word he sprang to the telephone and called the office of the Twentieth Century Vocal Academy. A moment later Mary's voice greeted him over the wire, and he was explaining what had happened. In return, the girl told briefly of her interview with Herrman and

"If you can hold the man for half an hour." she finished, "it will give me time to finish. Do

you think you can do it?"
"We can hold him all night!" said Carson, but he was mistaken. When he opened the bed-room door he sprang into the room with a cry of dismay. The window was open, and as he reached it he was just in time to see the prisoner eap from the fire escape to the ground, and disappear into the darkness.

Carson darted back to the telephone and

again called the number of the Vocal Academy, but there was no answer. Frantically he importuned the central exchange to find what was

In the meantime, Mary, awaiting the Professor's return, in Herrman's private office, was engaged in one of the most exciting experiences of her life. It was not due to a defective connection that Carson's second call failed of an answer, for the girl heard the bell, and had even taken the eceiver the hook to reply when she was held rigid with terror. The door had burst open, and the figure of Herrman's accomplice, the pseudo theatrical "manager," darted toward her

She dropped the receiver and was backing away from the desk, when her glance fell on an open drawer, in which was a revolver. Desperately she snatched it, and leveled it toward the advancing man, just as his arms closed fiendishly about her. She felt herself swaying, and then her ngers pressed the trigger of the weapon, and she sank to the floor.

It was this shot, echoing dully over the open wire which greeted Casper Carson, back in the flat, as he tried in vain to establish a response from Herrman's office. With a groan he dashed toward the door, calling to the others to follow In the office of Herrman, Mary Burnett lay

motionless on the floor, her white face upturned to the light. The man, bending over her, sprang back with a gasp of mortal terror. In his eyes was the look of a hunted animal at the thought that the woman at his feet might be dead. Crushing his hat down on his head, he darted out of the door, leaving the motionless girl behind him.
As the door banged shut, Mary raised herself

dizzily on an elbow, and surveyed her surround ings. She had not been shot-but had collapsed under the nervous shock of the situation. she caught hold of the desk, and managed to scramble uncertainly to her feet as the door opened again, and Professor Herrman walked in For a second the girl thought that he, too, had learned of the trap, but she was mistaken. With a snarl. Herrman tossed a bundle of bank-notes Mary tucked them into her hand-bag, and on

a sudden thought, drew a pad of paper toward her and scribbled a receipt. The man took it with a sneer. Before he could decipher its contents, she walked to the door, and pressed the elevator button. Two minutes later she was on the street and in the arms of Mona, who was the first of Casper Carson's rescue party to spring from the taxi-cab that had paused outside the building. Mona disengaged herself from the other's em brace, and, reaching into her hand-bag, extended undle of bank-notes to Winnie Andrews.

"I think this money is righteously yours, Upstairs in his office, Professor Herrman had

just finished reading the following receipt:
"Thanks for the return of the first five thousand dollars you swindled Miss Winnie Andrews out of! You will be overjoyed to know, too, that the woman upon whom you were calling tonight is also my accomplice. Call again! We shall all waiting for you with open arms-and an

Herrman slowly crumpled the paper in his hand, and smothered an oath. Even oaths would not do justice to his emotions:

